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The CIA: Secrecy Is Lawful

EDITOR'S NOTE—The Central Intelligence Agency's funding of the National Student Association and other private groups has raised controversy over the government's spy machinery. This story looks at the background of the CIA.

WASHINGTON (AP)—In the furor over Central Intelligence Agency handouts to students no one is questioning the CIA's legal authority to spend large amounts of the taxpayers' money in secret.

The 1949 Central Intelligence Agency Act says the CIA director may spend money "without regard to the provisions of law and regulations relating to the expenditure of government funds." He can do this on a voucher certified by him alone.

Nor does CIA have to report to Congress or to any federal department. It is an independent agency responsible to the President. It does give some information about its activities to a designated group of Congress members.

The secrecy laid down by law and practiced by the CIA is in the tradition of the spy business: for espionage to succeed, it must be kept quiet.

Thus the spreading disclosures about CIA payments are not to CIA's liking. And the publicity in each case means that even without the presidentially ordered investigation CIA would probably want to end that operation.

In historical perspective CIA is the postwar embodiment of government intelligence activities that date back to the earliest days of the Republic.

The main U.S. intelligence work was, until World War II, carried on by the armed services and by the State Department. The first four CIA directors after the war were admirals or generals.

But during the war, intelligence mushroomed into a huge and complicated business. New cloak and dagger outfits sprang up most notably the Office of Strategic Services.

With the end of the hot war and the beginning of the cold the intelligence functions outside of those that were strictly military were lumped in 1947 into a new agency, the CIA.

Today CIA is one of the federal government's biggest operations. Because of the secrecy, few people know just how large it is. Its subsidies for overseas student activities are only a fraction of the total.

By general acknowledgment CIA's annual budget runs into hundreds of millions of dollars most of it hidden in the multibillion-dollar appropriations Congress votes for defense.

It probably employs several thousand persons, though here again the numbers are secret. The CIA law provides for secrecy on "titles salaries or numbers of personnel employed by the agency."

CIA's headquarters in nearby Langley, Va., is on of the largest modern government buildings. It is identified from the adjacent highway only by a sign saying "EPR"—for "Bureau of Public Roads."

Proportionately, only a small percentage of CIA men are overseas in spy roles—although there is probably hardly a country around the world without some sort of CIA presence.

Many personnel are at work on such projects as research on foreign economic and scientific developments, monitoring and analyzing foreign propaganda broadcasts compiling data on foreign political personalities and organizations.

For instance, CIA runs what it believed to be the world's single most comprehensive system of information storage and retrieval. It has translation computers

that can convert Russian texts into English at 30,000 words an hour. Its global radio listening service relays important foreign broadcasts to Washington almost instantaneously.

Against this broad range of intelligence gathering, the recently disclosed CIA subsidies to student and other private groups have been a relatively small operation undertaken in the first instance at White House orders—not on CIA initiative.

There is some indication that former President Harry S. Truman opposed CIA getting into actions to achieve political goals, as distinguished from merely collecting intelligence.

Writing in 1963, the year after the CIA-linked Bay of Pigs fiasco, Truman, who was president when the CIA was created said:

"I never had any thought that when I set up the CIA that it would be injected into peacetime cloak and dagger operations. Some of the complications and embarrassment that I think we have experienced are in part attributable to the fact that this quiet intelligence arm of the President has been so removed from its intended role that it is being interpreted as a symbol of sinister and mysterious foreign intrigue—and a subject for cold war enemy propaganda."

"I, therefore, would like to see the CIA be restored to its original assignment as the intelligence arm of the President, and whatever else it can properly perform in that special field—and that its operational duties be terminated or properly used elsewhere."

The White House now says, however, that CIA support of American private organizations was started by the Truman administration under policies set by the National Security Council in 1952 and continued thereafter.

The National Security Council, composed of the top federal government officials

with foreign affairs-defense responsibilities, is the President's senior advisory body in this field.

Subsidies to the National Students Association began at a time when government officials and some internationally minded students were concerned about the global Communist campaign to take over nongovernment international groups and use them for the Kremlin's ends.

Some American students willing to travel to international meetings to contest the well-financed Red delegations lacked funds. Government officials decided the money for the overseas U.S. student activities should be paid secretly, so as to avoid opening the Americans to propaganda charges of being government agents. Hence the job went to CIA.

This is the official version. Another reason for CIA involvement, according to some who recall the circumstances 15 years ago, was the uproar over the communism in government charges by Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy, R-Wis.

American collegians then as now tended to criticize U.S. foreign policy, and some were far left by McCarthy's standards. Open government subsidies of students who strayed from official policy could have come under McCarthy's attack. CIA's secret payments were hidden from him.